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ABSTRACT

This report highlights the input of leaders at a national meeting in October 2001 to discuss an evaluation framework for the family support field. The meeting marked the beginning of the Evidence Along the Way National Family Support Evaluation Project, an initiative to develop a comprehensive framework for evaluating how well the family support approach works. The report describes program evaluation as a complex storytelling task with high-stakes risks for many programs, and notes reasons why current methods of evaluation are not working. Also described is the variety of evaluation resources for the family support field developed by Family Support America. The current initiative is based on the view that developing a theory of change requires evaluators to clarify what the program does and how it does it. Such theories of change have been mapped for five of the six models of family support described in the report. Several areas of agreement presented in the report highlight the growing convergence within the field regarding the future of family support evaluation. Evaluation challenges are placed in priority and recommendations to meet these challenges identified. The report includes a self-evaluation process designed to identify the theory of change used in program evaluation. Future activities of the National Family Support Evaluation project are described as being organized around five areas: (1) mapping and tracking family support; (2) analyzing and reviewing the literature; (3) developing a flexible evaluation framework; (4) recommending evaluation methodologies; and (5) accrediting quality programs. The report concludes with descriptions of organizational, print, and Internet resources. (KB)

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Evidence Along the Way • Book 1

ED 469 409

Issues in Family Support Evaluation

Report from a Meeting of National Thought Leaders

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Principles of Family Support Practice

1. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.

2. Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.

3. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.

4. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.

5. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.

6. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.

7. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.

8. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.

9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

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Chuck Wyrostok

A mother and son go over homework at an after-school family support program in Charleston, West Virginia. The state is one partner in Family Support America's Evidence Along the Way Project.

Issues in Family Support Evaluation

Report from a Meeting of National Thought Leaders

by David Diehl, Ph.D.

This monograph highlights the input of thought leaders at a national meeting in October 2001 to discuss an evaluation framework for the family support field. (Attendees are listed on the following page.) The meeting marked the beginning of the Evidence Along the Way National Family Support Evaluation Project. To learn more or to get involved in the Evidence Along the Way Project, please contact Family Support America Evaluation Specialist David Diehl, Ph.D.: ddiehl@familysupportamerica.org.

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Several years ago, in their influential book *Evaluating Family Programs*, Heather Weiss and Francine Jacobs addressed the age-old question: Is the cup half-empty or half-full? In this case, the "cup" was the evaluation of family support and education programs, and Weiss and Jacobs concluded that it was both half-empty and half-full: several longitudinal studies demonstrated the benefits of early childhood programs, but there were few evaluations of other family-serving programs.

To begin to address these issues, Family Support America has created tools that family support providers across the country are using to assess the degree to which their programs are operating according to the principles of family support practice. Yet this is only the first step in developing a comprehensive evaluation framework for the field. To evaluate how well the family support approach *works*—how well it benefits families in relation to other methods of assistance or no assistance at all—the field must find ways to effectively measure the outcomes of family support activities. This special focus section highlights Family Support America's intensive, multi-year initiative to lead the national effort to do just that.

Math versus Storytelling

When most people think of evaluation, they think of questionnaires, numbers, and statistics. However, evaluation is more about storytelling than about math. To conduct a successful evaluation, a program asks good questions, finds ways to answer these questions, and then uses the information to "tell its story," perhaps to solicit funds for program improvement or to show that the program is worthwhile. Programs can use numbers (quantitative information) to tell their stories, but they can also use words and experiences (qualitative information). In the best cases, evaluators blend quantitative and qualitative information into a well-rounded description of what is happening as the result of the program. This is no easy task. Telling a good story requires knowledge, skills, resources, commitment, and tools.

On top of this complexity, evaluation is a high-stakes game for many programs, which rely on it to demonstrate their effectiveness. Political agendas and tight budgets contribute to the pressure—with money scarce and programs in competition, funders look for ways to understand which programs provide the most bang for the buck. In such an environment, evaluation becomes a complex task of balancing stakeholders' competing interests.

Evaluation in the family support field faces the additional challenge of living up to the principles of family support practice. Family support program evaluations not only need to be accurate and meaningful, they also need to be done in ways that honor these principles. They must address traditional evaluation concerns as well as such issues as ensuring a representative balance of participants in the evaluation, not detracting from program delivery while collecting data, and respecting the cultural values of participating families.

This monograph highlights the input of thought leaders at a national meeting in October 2001 to discuss an evaluation framework for the family support field. In addition to senior staff of the convening organizations, Family Support America and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the following leaders attended:

Andrea Anderson, Ph.D., The Aspen Institute; Charles Bruner, Ph.D., Child & Family Policy Center; Richard Catalano, University of Washington; Judith K. Chynoweth, Foundation Consortium; Jessie Coleman, The Family Connection; Joy Dryfoos, Independent Researcher and Community Schools Specialist; Carl J. Dunst, Ph.D., Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute; Peter Gabor, Ph.D., University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work; Stacie G. Goffin, Ed.D., National Association for the Education of Young Children; Jennifer Greene, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana; Elaine Harris-Fulton, Wilkinsburg Family Support Center; Steven Heasley, West Virginia Governor's Cabinet on Children & Families; Robin Higa, Thurston County Community Network; Alla Ivask, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs; Francine H. Jacobs, Ed.D., Tufts University; M. Rebecca Kilburn, Ph.D., RAND; Jane Knitzer, Ed.D., National Center for Children in Poverty; Debra Lewis-Curlee, Collaborative for Organizing Mt. Pleasant; Janice MacAulay, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs; Edward W. Maibach, M.P.H., Ph.D., Porter Novelli; Judith Martinez, Colorado Foundation for Families and Children; Lynn McDonald, MSW, Ph.D., Wisconsin Center For Educational Research; Carol Mehesy, Colorado Foundation for Families and Children; William C. Nye, Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania; David L. Olds, Ph.D., Kempe Children's Center, University of Colorado; Adriana M. Pecina, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation; Laura Porter, Family Policy Council; Amy G. Rassen, LCSW, Jewish Family and Children's Services; Kenneth Seeley, Ph.D., Colorado Foundation for Families & Children; Jesus Ruben Segura, Mayor of Sunland Park; Yoland Trevino, Transformative Collaborations International; Jack Tweedie, National Conference of State Legislators; Bernice Weissbourd, M.A., Family Focus; Ruth A. Wooden, Porter Novelli; Sylvia Meiling Yee, Ph.D., Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund; Ruth E. Zambrana, Ph.D., University of Maryland

The Challenges of Family Support Evaluation

Finding ways to accurately evaluate family support programs and approaches is one of the most important challenges facing the field today. Funders, policymakers, legislators, and the general public are asking for more proof than ever in their quest to identify positive programs and spend money in effective ways. Yet evaluating family support programs remains as difficult as ever. The challenges evaluators face include:

- The fluid nature of family support services, which are continually responsive to families' needs and thus difficult to pinpoint and evaluate
- The individualized nature of family support services, which makes comparisons across individuals and programs difficult
- The difficulty of measuring specific outcomes and isolating program effects in a complex social world
- The difficulty of measuring the effects of prevention and promotion of strengths
- The amount of time programs need to develop before they are likely to show results
- The lack of time and money devoted to evaluation—especially at the program and community levels, where resources are scarce and service delivery is the priority
- The specialized skills need to perform evaluations, which local program administrators and staff may not possess
- The lack of support for evaluations at the local level—many program planners and participants do not find evaluations, as currently conducted, useful to their efforts to support families
- The failure of current evaluation methods to convince a broad audience—including the general public, legislators, and policymakers—of the power of family support

Why Current Evaluation Methods Aren't Working

There is a strong and growing sense in the field of family support that traditional evaluation methodologies have not successfully captured the impact of family support programs on participating families. This frustration is by no means new; it dates, in fact, back to some of the earliest work in evaluating community-based initiatives. More than a decade ago, Douglas Powell argued in *America's Family Support Programs: The Origins and Development of a Movement* that "using conventional research practices with community-based family support programs is akin to putting a square peg in a round hole.... Research designs and procedures for controlled laboratory settings will not work in the fluid world of a family support program."

Despite Powell's warnings, the great majority of decision makers still rely on the results of evaluation and research methodologies they consider scientific, objective, and rigorous—in part due to the widespread belief that quantitative methods are inherently superior to qualitative methods. And in a climate of perceived government waste and increasing focus on accountability and results, family support programs are under intense pressure to demonstrate their utility to society.

To do so, evaluators in the family support arena must develop innovative, flexible ways to assess the impacts of family support programs and systems. This is no small task. Such family-supportive evaluation methods must work for all the people they are meant to serve—including program participants, staff, and policymakers.

In response to these needs, Family Support America has begun formulating an evaluation framework that will enable the family support field to more accurately evaluate and replicate the effects of family support programs and activities.

Where We're Going: A Common Plan

In 1997, Family Support America, the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice, and the Child and Family Policy Center convened a national dialogue on the evaluation of family support and family-centered practice. The groundbreaking meeting laid the groundwork for future efforts to connect family support programs and practices with child and family well-being. The evaluators, policymakers, and program practitioners in attendance recommended that the field:

- Agree on what is already known about the effectiveness of family support programs
- Identify common outcomes that family support programs should strive for, including intermediate outcomes and indicators

Findings Hint at Wealth of Outcomes

While traditional evaluation techniques continue to present challenges to capturing the full impact of family support, some have hinted at the wealth of positive outcomes associated with high-quality programs.

In a 1998 article published in *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, for example, Comer and Fraser reviewed six family support program evaluations and concluded that "family-support programs that attempt to control, ameliorate, and eradicate risk factors associated with socioeconomic, educational, and other disadvantages can be effective in strengthening families and increasing the well-being of children." The evaluations showed that the programs had contributed to a variety of positive outcomes, including gains in child development, language development, educational attainment, school achievement, supportive home environments, parent-child interaction, health outcomes, and adult development. Although sample sizes for the evaluations were small, Comer and Fraser found them to be convincing arguments "that well-conceptualized and implemented family-support services have the capacity to improve family functioning."

Arnold Reynolds's recent evaluation of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, also emphasized the key role of family support in effective early childhood intervention (see *AFSM*, vol. 20, no. 2). His long-term study of the centers found that:

- Participating children had higher graduation rates and more years of completed education
- Participating children had lower drop-out rates and lower rates of juvenile arrest and violent crime arrests
- Participating children were retained in their grade less often and used special education services less frequently
- Effects were stronger for boys and for children who had participated for more years of the program

In an interview for *America's Family Support Magazine*, Reynolds explicitly tied these positive findings to the family support components of the program: "I believe a main reason we find a crime reduction effect is because of the family support component. If it were just an educational program, you wouldn't find the social outcomes that we've found. We have evidence that the family support component is partly responsible for the delinquency reduction effect" (vol. 20, no. 2).

- Compile a list of existing models of evaluation
- Make a list of indicators of child and family well-being and ask programs to add to or subtract from the list based on their experiences
- Develop a common language between practitioners and evaluators
- Revise evaluation methods to be more applicable to family support by:
  1. Creating a true partnership among evaluators, practitioners, and families
  2. Developing flexible evaluation methods
  3. Providing ongoing evaluation that is part of a program's developmental process
  4. Developing long-term relationships between programs and evaluators
  5. Building the capacity of others to evaluate
  6. Ensuring that evaluations are accountable to programs and families
- Help states as they begin to mandate evaluation by promoting methods that focus on internal program improvement and design and that include interactive evaluation and self-evaluation
- Create a technical assistance bank of evaluators, tools, and methods available to local programs
- Spread the capacity to perform evaluations throughout communities

This ambitious set of recommendations continues to guide Family Support America's ongoing work on evaluation issues. It highlights many of the important challenges facing the field.

What We've Developed: Resources for the Field

Over the past several years, Family Support America has developed a variety of evaluation resources for the family support field.

Family Support Evaluation Principles

Evaluation of family support efforts should draw from the principles of family support practice as described below.

While few evaluations may be able to follow all of these recommendations, it is important for programs to continue to ask: Are we performing this evaluation in a family-supportive way?

1. **Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.**
   - The evaluation is participatory—families, staff, and other stakeholders engage in all stages of the process.
   - The evaluation team works to make the evaluation understandable and accessible to all stakeholders and to the general public.
   - Consumer satisfaction measures represent key components of the evaluation.

2. **Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.**
   - The evaluation represents a learning opportunity and supports the development of the program and the families within it.
3. **Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.**
   - The evaluation includes a focus on family, program, and community strengths.
   - The outcomes framework utilizes promotional indicators, which reflect the prevention- and strengths-oriented approaches of family support (see sidebar, page 7).
4. **Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.**
   - The evaluation is consistent with the values of the cultural and ethnic groups in the program.
   - Practitioners conduct the evaluation in the primary language of participating families.
   - The evaluation team represents the program participants and works to overcome possible cultural barriers.
5. **Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.**
   - The evaluation team includes community members as much as possible.
   - Evaluation results are shared with the community.
   - The evaluation includes a focus on community-level factors and recognizes the need to place program evaluation within a community context.
   - Evaluation strategies emphasize the community-level effects of collaborative efforts.

Mapping and Defining the Field of Family Support

In 2000, Family Support America began creating a database of comprehensive information on family support programs across the country (on-line at www.familysupportamerica.org). The National Family Support Mapping Project arose in response to some simple but important questions:

- How many family support programs are there?
- What families are they serving?
- What services and programs do they offer?
- What are their funding sources?

Foundations, public policymakers, state government agencies, parents, and community leaders were asking these questions, but no one had the answers.

In addition to beginning to answer these questions, the project has also raised a new one—what defines a family support program? While early efforts to define the field focused on freestanding programs, the mapping project made clear that family support is being practiced in a wide range of settings. Based on this new information, Family Support America has developed a family support typology that describes six basic models of family support:

1. **Stand-alone family support centers:** Freestanding centers, typically known as family support or family resource centers
2. **Family support programs nested within larger organizations:** Programs that are part of larger organizations (such as school-based family support programs and programs located in Boys and Girls Clubs, libraries, and health care settings)
3. **Other organizations that adopt and work from the principles of family support practice:** Family support values and principles expressed in a variety of settings where a concrete family support program or center is not present (such as in child welfare agencies, in businesses, and in other settings)
4. **Community-level systems of family support:** Networks of multiple family support sites that represent a partnership between agencies and organizations to create a community-wide system of family support delivery
5. **Comprehensive community collaborative structures:** Help plan and organize human services at the community level, as part of states' movements to grant more decision-making powers to localities and communities
6. **Family support at the workplace:** Employer-sponsored family support programs for employees and/or workplace initiatives that build on the strengths of families and communities

A Canadian Perspective on Evaluation

Across the border, an ongoing evaluation initiative being conducted by the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (CAFRP) has found that Canadian family support programs:

- Value evaluation, especially for providing ongoing feedback, informing program development, and providing the basis for accountability
- Generally report feeling "over-evaluated," often participating in more than one evaluation per funding year
- Generally feel that evaluation, as currently practiced, has very little utility for them
- Have identified what they consider inaccurate representations of their program in evaluation reports
- Have few resources for conducting evaluations on their own

To help make the process a more accurate and participatory one, CAFRP recommends that evaluation efforts in Canada focus on obtaining feedback for program improvements, proving that programs work, and building the knowledge base for family support approaches.

Building on its conversations with the field, CAFRP hopes to help build the country's evaluation capacity by:

- Continuing work on developing evaluation models and approaches
- Developing evaluation tools (such as data collection instruments)
- Developing a research agenda that emphasizes the ways in which the goals of improving programs, proving program effectiveness, and building knowledge can complement each other
- Supporting field-level evaluation efforts
- Helping to train all stakeholder groups in evaluation methods and approaches
- Facilitating ongoing communications between practitioners, funders, and evaluators

Adapted from Gabor, Peter (2001) Building Evaluation Capacity in the Family Resource Program Field, *presented at the Family Support America Thought Leaders Meeting (Princeton, N.J.).*

- The evaluation serves as a stimulus to a more community-centered and collaborative approach to working with families.

6. **Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.**
   - Families take ownership of the evaluation and use it as a tool for program and community improvement.
   - Families take a leadership role in the evaluation and represent the primary stakeholders in the process.
   - Programs advocate for more responsive and useful evaluation approaches and funders and decision makers incorporate this feedback into their work.
7. **Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.**
   - The evaluation addresses both formal and informal supports that may influence families.
8. **Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.**
   - The evaluation is part of a developmental process, and practitioners conduct it in accordance with the developmental stage of the program.
   - Practitioners use multiple methods to more fully capture what takes place in a program or initiative.
   - The evaluation is tailored to the needs of the program and community; specific methodologies and tools are matched to the needs and goals of the program.
   - Practitioners use evaluation results for continuous improvement and strategic planning.
9. **Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.**
   - Practitioners conduct the evaluation according to the principles of family support practice.
   - The evaluation requires programs and communities to articulate a vision for change.
   - Practitioners integrate the evaluation into program planning.
   - The evaluation is useful, not burdensome, and evaluators communicate information in a timely fashion.

Promotional Indicators

Promotion as a strategy of family support delivery was introduced by Carl Dunst and Carol Trivette, who wrote that one of the defining characteristics of family support is a focus on promoting strengths and capacities. To ensure that evaluation of family support efforts is consistent with this goal, Family Support America has been working with eight states to develop

"promotional indicators" of family support. Promotional indicators measure the increased capacity of children, youth, families, and communities to successfully address challenges—rather than focusing on their deficits.

See below for a list of recommended promotional indicators for the family support field.

Many promotional indicators tend to be steps on the way to achieving longer-term outcomes. They highlight the importance of measuring and understanding intermediate markers of development, encouraging program planners to think about the ways in which their activities lead to increased strengths—and creating windows of opportunity to modify program strategies when necessary to reach the final outcomes they desire.

Family Support America has supported the use of promotional indicators at two levels—measuring child and family well-being at the state and community level, through asset-based "report cards," and evaluating the effects of specific programs and initiatives on participating families.

Other Evaluation Tools

Family Support America offers programs and communities the following tools for assessing their own and their community's strengths and needs:

- *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment* (1998, 2nd ed.): This manual helps programs discover important information about their communities, including data pertinent to family support evaluation. It includes sample surveys, data-collection worksheets, and progress charts that can be customized with the companion diskette.
- *How Are We Doing? A Program Self-Assessment Toolkit for the Family Support Field* (1998): This guidebook and interactive software database give family support programs a process for measuring their success and making plans for improvement. The kit provides specific benchmarks to help programs enact the principles of family support practice and provides detailed checklists for working with a community team to systematically assess program performance in 10 areas—governance, outreach/engaging families, programs and activities, parent education and child development, working one-on-one with families, relationships with the community, center environment, home visiting, staff roles and capabilities, and monitoring and evaluation.
- *Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit* (2000): The evaluation chapter in this three-volume reference set focuses on such issues as elements of successful evaluations, tips for data collection, and how to use theories of change to describe program goals and develop strategies for achieving them.

Promotional Indicators of Family Support

Outcomes	Promotional Indicators
Children ready for school	• Percent of children entering kindergarten demonstrating appropriate progress in several areas (physical-motor, cognitive, language, social and emotional development)
Children succeeding in school	• Percent of parents actively engaged in their children's learning and education
Safe and stable families	• Percent of adults who have someone to rely on (a support network)
Safe, supportive, and engaged communities	• Percent of individuals volunteering in their community
Youth engaging in positive behavior	• Percent of children who have frequent involvement with and receive emotional support from both parents • Percent of youth reporting a meaningful relationship with an adult • Percent of youth involved in sports, clubs, or organizations at school or in the community three or more hours a week • Percent of youth whose families set clear expectations, rules, and consequences
Healthy families	• Percent of children fully immunized by age two • Percent of pregnant women receiving pre-natal care in their first trimester • Percent of children and families covered by health insurance

In addition, Family Support America has also been working with communities to develop local report cards that show how the community's health, school preparedness and achievement, and economic well-being outcomes stack up. This work may result in a published guide to using community report cards in the future.

Where We Are Now: Developing a Framework

Last October, Family Support America and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation convened a thought leaders meeting on developing an evaluation framework for the field of family support. More than 30 leading thinkers from across the country—including evaluators, researchers, family support practitioners, community and parent leaders, foundation representatives, and Family Support America staff and board members—came together at the meeting to define the challenges facing the field and consider how these challenges might be overcome to develop a comprehensive family support evaluation initiative.

Using Theories of Change

Theory-based evaluation is one way for programs to be clear about their impact. Developing a "theory of change"—a theory about the role of programs in the changes measured in participants' lives—requires evaluators to clarify *what* the program in question does and *how* it does it.

In the time allowed by the thought leaders meeting, participants developed practical theories of change for five of the six models of family support (see "Mapping and Defining the Field of Family Support" on page 5 and "What's Your Theory of Change?" on page 10). When future groups come together to construct comprehensive theories of change for all six models, the framework will serve as the foundation for both family support program planning and evaluation.

Points of Agreement

Participants repeatedly voiced the following convictions at the thought leaders meeting, pointing to a great degree of convergence within the field regarding the future of family support evaluation. They agreed that:

1. **The inclusion of families and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of an evaluation framework is crucial.**
   - An inclusive and participatory approach is needed to create buy-in and ownership of evaluation activities at the program level.

A New How-To Guide for Measuring Outcomes

Published in 2001 by the FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community Based Family Resource and Support programs, *Outcome Accountability for Family Support Programs* offers in-depth guidance on how to identify, measure, and report on family support program outcomes. The set includes:

Volume I

- An in-depth reference manual on outcome accountability

Volume II

- An introduction to the concept of outcome accountability
- A glossary of key terms
- Worksheets for identifying desired outcomes and developing an evaluation plan
- Forms for collecting demographic, service, and customer satisfaction data
- Outcome measurement surveys and questionnaires
- Instructions for constructing scales
- Instructions for collecting and analyzing outcome data
- Instructions for writing an outcome report for funders
- Instructions for using outcome data to make program improvements
- Resources for more information on outcome accountability

The outcome evaluation model used in the guides allows programs to document progress on short- and intermediate-term outcomes—outcomes that may contribute to improvements in long-term outcomes for families. While programs' ability to demonstrate these outcomes does not replace the need for the more rigorous evaluation research, it will help them prepare to participate in such projects.

To order a copy of *Outcome Accountability for Family Support Programs*, send a check or purchase order for $25 plus $6 postage and handling to:

Tom Cabarga
Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project
800 Eastowne Drive, Suite 105
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

- From the beginning of an evaluation effort, programs should seek input from all stakeholders, including families, program staff, community members, key decision-makers, and funders.
- Programs should set standards for participation in the evaluation process.
- Programs must recognize the tension between efficiency in gathering information and the full participation of a variety of stakeholders.

2. **Current evaluation methods are not adequate—there is a need to broaden the methods and tools used to evaluate family support initiatives.**
   - Evaluators should consider implementing an organic evaluation process in cooperation with data collection.
   - Evaluators should include cost-benefit analyses in evaluation activities.
   - The field should embrace flexible evaluation methods that will "tell the story" of family support programs.

3. **Evaluation must be culturally relevant and evaluators must be culturally competent.**
   - Evaluation processes and indicators must reflect diverse cultures and must be culturally appropriate.
   - The cultures represented by participating families should shape what the evaluation measures as well as the ways in which the evaluation is conducted.
   - Evaluation must tap indigenous community wisdom.
   - Culturally competent practices should emerge through a participatory process of gathering information.

Evaluation Challenges and Solutions

The thought leaders group also identified and prioritized major evaluation challenges, and developed recommendations for the following challenges:

1. **Evaluations must measure a messy process in a participatory way.** Family support programs are notoriously complex and evolving. To accurately reflect this reality, evaluators should:
   - Develop a flexible set of indicators of success
   - Interview families and communities so they can inform the process
   - Build program and community capacity for engaging in evaluation activities
   - Convene funders to discuss evaluation approaches and common outcomes
   - Develop and utilize qualitative evaluation methods that capture the stories of families and programs and how they achieve progress and success
   - Start small, learn from the process, and then develop new tools and models

Data Management Made Easy

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, in partnership with Allegheny County Family Centers, has developed the Family Support Management Information System (FS/MIS) to help family support centers collect and analyze program and outcome information for their evaluation efforts. All 30 family support centers in Pittsburgh and surrounding Allegheny County currently use the system.

FS/MIS monitors families' participation in center activities and documents their progress toward self-selected goals and outcomes. More than 25 standardized reports compile such data as:

- Demographic information for all center participants, including dates of birth, educational and employment status, health care data, and household income
- Referral source information and participants' interests in programs
- Pregnancy and birth outcome information
- Developmental assessments for children
- Information on children in placement outside of the home
- Data on participant involvement in center activities
- Records of staff/family interactions and services provided

To learn more about FS/MIS, contact Debra Lee Stark at the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, 412/624-4553, dlstark@pi

2. **Evaluations must measure the adherence to family support principles.** To measure the extent to which family support principles are being enacted in programs, evaluators should:
   - Consider the program's purpose, context, culture, and community factors
   - Acknowledge program variation and focus on the family support principles that apply in specific situations
   - Develop ways to measure the connectedness between parents and staff in the program
   - Clarify the outcomes of interest
   - Follow evaluation methods that integrate the various domains of family support

continued on page 12

What's Your Theory of Change?

A large part of evaluating a program is understanding what it is trying to accomplish. Here's how to use the "theory of change" model to do that. Once you complete this process, evaluation is largely a matter of collecting the data. Using your theory of change means your data will be relevant and useful to your evaluation.

The Theory of Change Process	Sample Answers	Your Answers
Step 1: Choose one of the following five models of family support: 1. Stand-alone family support centers 2. Family support programs nested within larger organizations 3. Other organizations that adopt and work from the principles of family support practice 4. Community-level systems of family support 5. Comprehensive community collaborative structures 6. Family support at the workplace	Model 1: Stand-alone family support centers	
Step 2: Choose one of the following major outcomes: 1. Healthy births 2. Physically and emotionally healthy children, adolescents, and adults 3. Children ready for school 4. Children succeeding in school 5. Youth engaging in positive behavior 6. Safe and stable families 7. Families with adequate income 8. Safe, supportive, and engaged communities	Safe and stable families	
Step 3: Identify 6 to 10 key conditions or elements that must be in place to achieve this outcome.	• Families are engaged • Resources are predictable and adequate • Relationships are based in respect • The environment is welcoming • There are enough qualified staff • Families are motivated to participate • Program strategies are effective • Families define their own outcomes • Families—not programs—are the focus of the work	

The Theory of Change Process	Sample Answers	Your Answers
Step 4: Select one of the key conditions or elements generated in Step 3 and further identify the additional elements or conditions that lead to it.	**Families are engaged:** • Outreach is individualized • There are opportunities for reciprocity • Families experience a sense of community • Parents are involved in program design, implementation, and governance • Program staff "walk the talk" • Both parents and staff benefit from the same training and supports (facilitation, evaluation, grant writing, parenting, etc.)	
Step 5: Brainstorm key activities and strategies necessary for achieving these elements or conditions and that ultimately contribute to the achievement of the long-term outcome.	• Develop strategic points of engagement—births, moving, marriage • Be proactive—pre-marital counseling, financial literacy • Offer a variety of participant-defined activities • Develop creative, persistent outreach • Form consistency in relationships—address staff turnover and establish mutual aid peer support networks	
Step 6: Explain your theory by showing how the activities/strategies and elements/conditions lead to the achievement of the outcome.	Family engagement is a major pathway for safe and stable families. The necessary conditions for achieving family engagement are individualized outreach; opportunities for reciprocity; a sense of community; parent involvement in program design, implementation, and governance; and stable, skilled staff. To achieve these conditions, we must create programs that tie into life events; offer participant-driven activities that are scheduled at convenient times; engage parents in designing programs, evaluation, and operations/ governance; and provide training and support services that benefit both parents and staff.	

Evaluation continued from page 9

3. **Programs need to find effective ways to communicate evaluation results.** To effectively communicate evaluation information to the relevant audiences, evaluators should:
   - Focus on "telling the story" of the families and programs—through results mapping, for example, and other ethnographic and qualitative techniques
   - Translate the jargon of evaluation into a common language that can be presented with examples
   - Develop communication tools such as team presentations and fact sheets
   - Work to remove the threat that programs feel from evaluation
   - Build relationships, focusing on trust, respect, and access to information
   - Engage stakeholders from the beginning of the process
   - Set standards for participation and parent engagement

Next Steps: The FamilyWise National Family Support Evaluation Project

To continue its work toward improving evaluation practice in the family support field, Family Support America recently received a planning grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for its new Evidence Along the Way National Family Support Evaluation Project. The project is organized around the following focus areas.

Mapping and Tracking Family Support

Funders and policymakers need a core amount of information about the six models of family support before they can understand and respond to the needs of the field. To develop this information base, which will be the foundation for future evaluation activities, Family Support America is mapping and tracking all five types of family support programs through its National Family Support Mapping Project.

Analyzing and Reviewing the Literature

Reviewing the social science research relevant to family support outcomes and strategies is a crucial step in understanding how best to form a family support evaluation framework. Family Support America will analyze this body of this information, synthesize its findings, and present it in an easy-to-follow format to family support practitioners and policymakers. The findings from this review will inform the Evidence Along the Way Project's evaluation framework, described below.

Developing a Flexible Evaluation Framework

Family Support America will soon begin working with programs and communities to develop a framework of relevant outcomes and indicators of family support that programs and initiatives can use in their evaluation efforts. The framework, based on theories of change that explain how programs influence families' well-being, will serve as a flexible menu of options from which programs can select outcomes and indicators relevant to their goals—adding or changing outcomes and indicators as they see fit. In keeping with the principles of family support practice, it will emphasize promotional indicators that tap into families' strengths.

Recommending Evaluation Methodologies

In addition to developing a framework of outcomes and indicators, the project will seek answers to the questions: Which evaluation methodologies will help the field conduct more useful evaluations? Which will help programs gather and provide information to policymakers and decision makers?

Appropriate methodologies should revolve around family support theories of change, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods and allowing programs to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders.

Accrediting Quality Programs

Quality practice is a major focus of the Evidence Along the Way Project—one of the major results of dependable evaluation findings will be their contribution to our understanding of the ways family support should operate and program staff and families should interact. As part of this focus on quality practice, Family Support America will explore the merits of:

- Family support program certification—a program self-assessment and planning process currently available to interested programs
- Family support program accreditation—an intensive program assessment and evaluation process to ensure quality practice in the field

The Future of Family Support Evaluation

Each of the evaluation efforts described in this special focus section has focused on a singular goal: enabling the family support field to more accurately tell the story of family support.

Because of these activities, and the determination and perseverance of family support practitioners and advocates nationwide, the cup of family support evaluation may soon be filled with family-supportive evaluation methods that work for everyone—program participants, staff, policymakers, and the communities in which they are based.

—David Diehl, Ph.D.

Help Us Help You Evaluate Your Program!

Family Support America needs your input to help make our Evidence Along the Way National Family Support Evaluation Project a success! Please complete the following survey and send your comments to:

Family Support America
Attn: Evidence Along the Way
20 N. Wacker Drive, Ste. 1100
Chicago, IL 60606
Fax: 312/338-1522

1. Are you aware of family support programs or initiatives that have conducted good evaluations? If so, list the program names and contact information:

2. What kinds of evaluation supports, tools, or resources would be most useful to you?

3. In the area of family support evaluation, what are the most important issues or challenges you think need to be addressed?

4. What currently available evaluation resources (such as manuals, research articles, toolkits, and Web sites) do you find most useful? Which of these would you recommend to others?

5. Do you have general comments or other suggestions for our work on evaluation?

Resource File

Organizations

The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives

281 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10010
212/677-5510
www.aspenroundtable.org

A forum in which foundation sponsors, directors, technical assistance providers, evaluators, and public sector officials meet to discuss lessons learned by initiatives across the country. Includes a focus on community-based research and evaluation, including theories of change approaches.

Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs

707– 331 Cooper Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 0G5
613/237-7667
www.frp.ca

A national organization representing more than 2,000 family support programs and services across Canada. Promotes the well-being of families through national leadership, consultation, and resources for family support professionals and advocates. Is engaged in an initiative exploring evaluation issues in the Canadian context.

Center for Assessment and Policy Development

111 Presidential Boulevard, Suite 234
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004
610/664-4540
www.capd.org

Helps institutions, communities, and public systems improve outcomes for children, adolescents, and families. Works on a variety of issues, including improving the health, positive development, and early school success of young children; family support and empowerment; education; adolescent parenting; violence prevention; community change; reduction in racism; leadership; and civic engagement. Employs evaluation as a tool for understanding social issues.

Harvard Family Research Project

Harvard Graduate School of Education
Longfellow Hall
Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138
617/495-9108
www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp

Strives to increase the effectiveness of public and private organizations and communities as they promote child development, student achievement, healthy family functioning, and community development. Fosters a sustainable learning process that relies on the collection, analysis, synthesis, and application of information to guide problem-solving and decision-making. Works on research and evaluation, outcomes-based accountability, early childhood, after-school issues, and family-school connections, and publishes a newsletter, *The Evaluation Exchange*.

Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute

18A Regent Park Boulevard
Asheville, NC 28806
828/255-0470
www.puckett.org

Engages in activities that enhance and promote healthy child, parent, and family functioning. Fosters the adoption of evidence-based practices that build on the capacities and strengths of children, parents, and families; communities; and public and private organizations.

Search Institute

The Banks Building
615 First Avenue NE, Suite 125
Minneapolis, MN 55413
www.search-institute.org

Has developed a framework of 40 developmental assets for youth that emphasize the positive experiences, relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities crucial to positive development. Recently expanded its asset framework to include infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary-age children.

Publications

Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self-Assessment & Accountability

edited by David Fetterman, Shakeh Kaftarian, & Abraham Wandersman
1996, 411 pp.

Provides a variety of perspectives on empowerment and participatory evaluation and the ways in which evaluation can serve to foster improvement and self-determination.

Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

Evaluating Family Programs

by Heather Weiss and Francine Jacobs
1988, 556 pp.

Describes family support and education programs, summarizes what is known about their effectiveness, and provides strategies and tools for program developers and evaluators. Presents a broad framework for evaluation applicable to both small community programs and large research and demonstration programs.

Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

Evaluating School-linked Services: Considerations and Best Practices

by Karen Horsch
1998, 31 pp.

Nine evaluators of school-linked services programs identify considerations and best practices related to evaluating outcomes, sustainability, and collaboration to help determine how school-linked services programs work, what their impact is, and whether they should be expanded.

Harvard Family Research Project
617/496-4304
www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp

Evaluation Exchange

A free newsletter published quarterly by the Harvard Family Research Project that highlights innovative evaluation methods and approaches, emerging trends in evaluation practice, and practical applications of evaluation theory. The current issue's topic is evaluation and family support.

Harvard Family Research Project
617/495-9108
www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval.htm

Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change

by the California Family Resource Center Learning Circle
2000, 36 pp.

Defines the key characteristics and activities of quality family support centers, describes how they function as a vehicle for change for families and communities, and helps policymakers and funders make the case for family support centers.

California Office of Child Abuse Prevention
916/445-2771

Family Support Evaluation

FRCA Report, Vol. 16, No. 4

Presents evaluation strategies at state and local levels, as well as a resource file of evaluation publications.

Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

Finding Our Way: A Participatory Evaluation Method for Family Resource Programs

by D. Ellis.
1998, 200 pp.

Guides programs though a participatory evaluation method. Includes extensive background information, quotations from program practitioners, a glossary, examples, sample tools, and a comprehensive annotated bibliography.

Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs
613/237-8515
www.frp.ca

How Are We Doing? A Program Self-Assessment Toolkit for the Family Support Field

by Nilofer Ahsan & Lina Cramer
1998, 150 pp. plus software

Provides detailed checklists so programs can work with a community team to systematically assess their performance.

Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

Making a Difference: Moving to Outcome-Based Accountability for Comprehensive Service Reforms

by Nancy Young, Sid Gardner, Soraya Coley, Lisbeth Schor, and Charles Bruner
1994, 40 pp.

This National Center for Service Integration resource brief provides several different frameworks to stimulate state and community approaches to moving toward outcome-based accountability.

Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

Making it Count: Evaluating Family Preservation Services

by Francine Jacobs and Jennifer Kapuscik
2000, 390 pp.

Explains how to conduct feasible, affordable, and ongoing evaluations of programs at the state or local level using the five-tiered approach developed by Francine Jacobs and Heather Weiss.

Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development, Tufts University
617/627-5327

New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives, Volume 1: Concepts, Methods and Contexts

edited by James Connell, Anne Kubisch, Lisbeth Schorr, and Carol Weiss
1995, 225 pp.

Provides a broad overview of the issues and challenges facing comprehensive community issues. Includes chapters on theory-based evaluation, using community-wide indicators in an evaluation, and the role of evaluators.

Aspen Institute
212/677-5510
www.aspenroundtable.org

New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives, Volume 2: Theory, Measurement, and Analysis

edited by Karen Fulbright-Anderson, Anne Kubisch, and James Connell
1998, 256 pp.

Builds on the first volume and focuses more extensively on the theory of change approach to evaluation and measurement issues in evaluation.

Aspen Institute
212/677-5510
www.aspenroundtable.org

Promotional Indicators: Proceedings from a Meeting on Family Support Evaluation

by Family Support America
2000, 97 pp.

Includes a summary of Family Support America's 2000 symposium on family support evaluation, next steps for the field, and selected speaker notes and background papers.

Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

W.K. Kellogg Evaluation Manual

by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation
1998, 110 pp.

Written primarily for program and project directors and staff, this free manual provides a framework for thinking about evaluation as a useful tool for programs. (Ask for item #1203)

Collateral Management Company
616/964-0700

Internet Resources

American Evaluation Association

www.eval.org

Features information on collaborative, participatory, and empowerment evaluation; evaluation use; health evaluation; human services evaluation; and minority issues in evaluation.

Child Trends

www.childtrends.org

Provides information on research and data, including indicator formation for children, youth, and families, and a focus on positive indicators. *Child Indicator* newsletter and *Research Briefs* are also available on the site.

Fiscal Policy Studies Institute: Results and Performance Accountability

www.resultsaccountability.com

Contains a wealth of information on results-based accountability, financing, and related issues.

Kids Count

www.aecf.org/kidscount

A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, this national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the U.S. provides policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being.

Matrix Outcomes Model

iccs.csumb.edu/html/community/matrix

Provides a set of complementary assessment, case management, and evaluation tools, addressing the need of service providers to document and track consumer, family, agency, and community outcomes over time. Site includes an overview, a slide presentation, examples of indicators, community scales, an online tutorial, reports, and related links.

Outcome Measurement Resource Network

national.unitedway.org/outcomes

Provides resources and information on outcomes for United Way sites and other organizations. Site describes resources, shows examples of current initiatives using the framework, and provides an on-line resource library.

Out-of-School Evaluation Database

www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html

The Harvard Family Research Project compiles this one-of-a-kind, searchable database of evaluations of 21 out-of-school-time programs, with 5 added per quarter.

Promising Practices Network on Children, Families, and Communities

www.promisingpractices.net

A source for easy-to-understand descriptions and reliable information on services, activities, approaches, and policies that have been shown to achieve results for children and families. Programs and activities are grouped according to the following outcomes: healthy and safe children; children ready for school; children succeeding in school; strong families; and self-sufficient families.

Results Mapping Laboratory

www.pire.org/resultsmapping

Provides an overview and resources on approaches to results mapping (translating qualitative success stories into hard data) and outcome engineering through journey mapping (focusing on the attainment of results and growth attainment that identifies markers of success).

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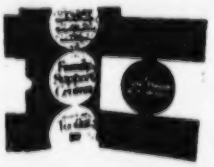

Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit

How Are We Doing? A Program Self-Assessment Toolkit for the Family Support Field

Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment

Making Room at the Table: Fostering Family Involvement in the Planning & Governance of Formal Support Systems

Learning to Be Partners: An Introductory Training Program for Family Support Staff

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Chicago, IL 60606
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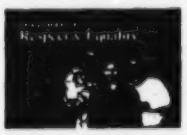
Phone: 312/338-0900 x 155



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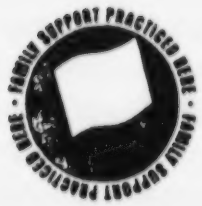

Family Support America, formerly Family Resource Coalition of America, promotes family support as the nationally recognized movement to strengthen and support families and places the principles of family support practice at the heart of every setting in which children and families are present. By identifying and connecting individuals and organizations that have contact with families; by providing technical assistance, training and education, conferences, and publications; and by promoting the voice of families, Family Support America is taking family support to scale as the national strategy for ensuring the well-being of our children today and in the years to come.

For more copies of this publication, to join the nation's family support organization, or for more information, contact:

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FAMILY SUPPORT America

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